

MAY 31, 1976

CALIFORNIA'S "PROPOSITION 15"

ANNCR: ON JUNE 8, THE VOTERS OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA WILL NOT ONLY EXPRESS THEIR PREFERENCES IN THE PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTIONS. THEY ALSO WILL DECIDE ON THE FUTURE OF NUCLEAR ENERGY IN THEIR STATE. VOA NEWS ANALYST JOHN ALBERT SAYS THEIR DECISION MAY HAVE IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REST OF THE COUNTRY. VOICE: CUSTOMARILY THERE ARE MANY QUESTIONS TO BE DECIDED BY THE VOTERS OF CALIFORNIA IN ELECTIONS SUCH AS THE ONE ON JUNE 8. BUT "PROPOSITION 15"-- OR "NUCLEAR SAFEGUARD INITIATIVE", AS IT IS FORMALLY CALLED-- IS THE COUNTRY'S FIRST REFERENDUM ON NUCLEAR POWER.

TO PUT IT MOST SIMPLY, THE ISSUE IS THE SAFETY OF NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS THAT PRODUCE ELECTRICITY. THOSE WHO VOTE "YES" ON PROPOSITION 15 WILL VOTE TO PUT MUCH STRONGER SAFEGUARDS THAN EXIST NOW ON CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION OF SUCH POWER PLANTS. THOSE WHO VOTE "NO" WILL VOTE TO LET THINGS GO ON AS THEY ARE.

TO MENTION THE MAJOR POINTS, THE MEASURE WOULD REQUIRE THE STATE LEGISLATURE, BY A TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY, TO VOUCH FOR THE SAFETY OF THE REACTORS AND THE FUTURE DISPOSAL OF RADIOACTIVE WASTES. FAILING SUCH APPROVAL, NO NEW ATOMIC POWER PLANTS COULD BE BUILT, AND EXISTING ONES WOULD FIRST HAVE TO REDUCE THEIR POWER, AND LATER CLOSE DOWN ALTOGETHER. FURTHERMORE, POWER COMPANIES WOULD HAVE TO ASSUME GREATER LIABILITY FOR DAMAGE OR INJURIES IN THE EVENT OF A NUCLEAR-PLANT ACCIDENT. (OPT) PRESENT FEDERAL LAW LIMITS A COMPANY'S LIABILITY TO FIVE-HUNDRED-SIXTY-MILLION DOLLARS; THE PROPOSED CALIFORNIA LAW WOULD REQUIRE THE COMPANIES TO ACHIEVE REMOVAL OF THAT LIMIT WITHIN ONE YEAR OR

BEFORE TO REDUCE OUTPUT OF EXISTING NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS AND HALT CONSTRUCTION OF NEW ONES. (END OPT).

OPPONENTS OF THE PROPOSITION SAY THESE CONDITIONS WOULD MAKE NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS ECONOMICALLY UNFEASIBLE, AND WOULD BE A DEATHBLOW. THEY FEAR SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE STATE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND FOR ITS EMPLOYMENT SITUATION. THUS, THE OPPONENTS INCLUDE NOT ONLY THE UTILITY COMPANIES AND BUSINESS IN GENERAL, BUT ALSO TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS. SUPPORTERS OF THE MEASURE DENY THESE PREDICTIONS. THEY SAY IT WILL MAKE NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS SAFE, ACCELERATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATE ENERGY SOURCES AND ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE.

HOWEVER, EVEN THE MOST QUALIFIED SCIENTISTS AND TECHNICIANS CANNOT AGREE ON THE SAFETY ASPECTS OF NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS, AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC APPEARS RATHER CONFUSED BY THE CHARGES AND COUNTER-CHARGES.

THE FAMOUS NUCLEAR PHYSICIST DOCTOR EDWARD TELLER ARGUES STRONGLY AGAINST THE REFERENDUM, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, HE HAS PROPOSED BUILDING FUTURE NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS UNDERGROUND, THUS INCREASING THEIR SAFETY. DOCTOR TELLER'S ARGUMENT IS THAT THERE IS NO KNOWN CASE IN WHICH INDUSTRIAL REACTORS HAVE AFFECTED THE HEALTH OF ANY INDIVIDUAL IN THE COUNTRY. THOSE ACCIDENTS WHICH HAVE OCCURRED, HE ARGUES, HAVE CAUSED EXPENSIVE DAMAGE WHICH LED TO IMPROVEMENTS THAT MADE LIFE AROUND REACTORS EVEN SAFER.

SUPPORTERS OF THE REFERENDUM MAKE PROMINENT USE OF THE STATEMENTS BY THREE FORMER GENERAL ELECTRIC COMPANY ENGINEERS WHO RESIGNED FROM RESPONSIBLE MANAGERIAL POSITIONS IN NUCLEAR OPERATIONS, CLAIMING THAT SAFETY MEASURES WERE TOTALLY INADEQUATE. SUPPORTERS ALSO POINT TO THE EARTHQUAKE-PRONE NATURE OF THE SITES PROPOSED FOR FUTURE NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS. THEY PAINT

VIVID PICTURES OF THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF A MAJOR EARTHQUAKE DAMAGING A NUCLEAR POWER PLANT.

(OPT) IT IS INTERESTING THAT THE MOVEMENT TO DEFEAT THE REFERENDUM IS LED BY THE FORMER GOVERNOR OF CALIFORNIA, EDIUND BROWN. HE IS FATHER OF THE PRESENT GOVERNOR WHO HAS AVOIDED TAKING A POSITION ON THE ISSUE. TO CONFUSE THE SITUATION EVEN FURTHER, THREE BILLS ARE PENDING IN THE LEGISLATURE, WHICH THE GOVERNOR SAYS HE WOULD SIGN AND WHICH PROVIDE FOR STRINGENT SAFEGUARDS IN THE NUCLEAR POWER FIELD, BUT WHICH DO NOT GO AS FAR AS PROPOSITION 13. (END OPT)

PUBLIC OPINION POLLS SHOW AN APPARENT SLIGHT MAJORITY AGAINST THE PROPOSITION, BUT WITH A LARGE NUMBER OF VOTERS STILL UNDECIDED. THUS THE VOTE ON JUNE 8, IS LIKELY TO BE CLOSE, AND COULD GO EITHER WAY. WHATEVER THE OUTCOME, THE ISSUE MAY LEAD TO LENGTHY LITIGATION IN THE COURTS, AND, FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES, MAY SLOW DOWN NUCLEAR POWER DEVELOPMENT ANYHOW.

THE REST OF THE COUNTRY IS WATCHING THE OUTCOME OF THE CALIFORNIA REFERENDUM; SIMILAR INITIATIVES ARE BEING WORKED ON IN ALMOST A DOZEN OTHER STATES. IT IS CLEAR THAT NUCLEAR POWER HAS BECOME A PUBLIC ISSUE, AND -- IN TIME-- IT MAY EVEN OVERSHADOW THE VOTERS' DECISIONS IN THE PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES.